

God has given to us, I know well, the liberty of use, but only so far as necessary; and He has determined that the use should be common. **From Text to Sermon with Philipians 1:1-6:**
A Hispanic Perspective

Pablo y Jiménez How much more glorious is it to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments! **Hispanic Baptists in Texas:**

A Glorious and Threatened History **Ernest E. Atkinson** Who, then, will have the more sumptuous things, if all select the simpler? Men, I would say, if they make use of them impartially and indifferently. But if it be impossible for all to exercise self-restraint, yet, with a few to the use of what is necessary, we must seek of the many to do so.

Challenges to the Pastoral Care of Central Americans in the United States **Kenneth G. Davis, O.F.M., Conv.**

In fine, they must accordingly utterly cast off ornaments as girls' gewgaws, rejecting adornment itself entirely. For they ought to be adorned within, and show the inner woman beautiful.

La proclamación del evangelio hoy en Centro América: una reflexión teológica **George Cruz** And it is laid down as a dogma, that only the beautiful is good. And excellence alone appears through the beautiful body, and blossoms out in the flesh, exhibiting the amiable comeliness of self-control, whenever the character like a beam of light gleams in the form. For the beauty of each plant and animal consists in its individual excellence. And the excellence of man is righteousness, and temperance, and manliness, and godliness. The beautiful man is who is just, temperate, and in a word, good, not he who is rich. But now even the soldiers wish to be decked with gold, not having read that poetical saying:

Reflexiones teológicas desde el "With childish folly to the war he came, Laden with store of gold."¹

But the love of ornament, which is far from caring for virtue, but claims the body for itself, when the love of the beautiful has changed to empty show, is to be utterly expelled.

margen hispano ¹ *Ibid.*, ii. 872.

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PRESENTACION

El primer artículo del presente número, por el **Dr. Pablo A. Jiménez**, continúa la discusión y contribución que está teniendo lugar en los páginas de *Apuntes* sobre la hermenéutica hispana, y cómo se aplica a la predicación. El Dr. Jiménez es Director Ejecutivo de la Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana.

Le sigue un artículo sobre la historia de los bautistas hispanos en Texas, por el **Dr. Ernest E. Atkinson**, quien por largos años trabajó como misionero entre hispanos, comisionado por la Junta de Misiones Nacionales de la Convención Bautista del Sur. Ahora está jubilado en Texas.

Los últimos dos artículos tratan sobre una realidad de importancia creciente en los EE.UU.: la presencia centroamericana. El **Dr. Kenneth Davis, O.F.M., Conv.**, profesor de Oblate School of Theology y director del programa doctoral en ministerios hispanos de esa institución, ofrece directrices pastorales para ayudar a la iglesia a responder a este nuevo reto. El **Dr. George Cruz**, ministro de la Iglesia Reformada en América, y actualmente misionero de la Iglesia Presbiteriana de los EE.UU. en Honduras, ofrece unas reflexiones sobre el carácter y necesidades de la predicación en América Central.

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From Text to Sermon with Philippians 1:1-6: A Hispanic Perspective

Pablo A. Jiménez

In December 1994 I was invited to preach in one of the annual retreats of my denomination, *The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* in the United States and Canada. The topic seemed simple enough: *Our partnership in the gospel*. At first glance, the assigned text, Philippians 1:1-6, looked innocuous. These are the first six verses of the epistle. They include the traditional epistolary opening (1.1-2), that is, the verses that identify the sender (v. 1a), name the addressees (v. 1b) and convey greetings (v. 2). They also include the beginning of the section of thanksgiving that generally follows the epistolary opening (1.3-4). Therefore, my sermon began with a traditional, even romantic, perspective:

The letter of Paul to the Philippians is one of the most poignant documents in the New Testament. Written in and sent from prison, the Epistle is the Apostle's farewell. The letter was probably written from Rome (as implied by the references to the "imperial guard" [1.13] and the "emperor's household" [4.22]). Apparently, Paul did not survive this jail term.

The church at Philippi had learned of Paul's imprisonment and its members were justifiably concerned. At the time, the ruler was Nero, the fifth Emperor of Rome. Although during the first eight years of his government the Empire flourished--due mainly to the influence on the Emperor of the philosopher Seneca--Nero's conduct changed drastically after 62 A.D. He tended toward public brutality--using on occasion Christians as scapegoats for his actions. It is believed that both Peter and Paul lost their lives during his rule.

But Paul is still alive and well, preaching the Gospel of *Life* even to his would-be assassins. He knows that his life is endangered, but he also knows that life is a mystery that dwells solely in God's hands: "For to me, living is Christ, and dying is a gain" (1.21.) That is why he even dares to joke about death, asserting that he is "hard pressed" in choosing between living and dying: "I don't know what to do! I will be better off If I depart to be with Christ but you still need me. What to do? What to do? Well, don't worry. I am convinced that I will stay with you all a while longer" (compare with 1.21-25).

Evidently, Paul had a unique relationship with the Philippians. They had supported him in his missionary work (see 4.15-18) and had outdone in their generosity even wealthier churches, like the one in Corinth (I Co. 9.) Yes, they did have a close relationship. You only joke about death with your loved ones. The Philippians were his "partners" in ministry (1.5).

At this point in the sermon I became restive. Although the introduction of the sermon described the grim historic context, I thought that the picture was too

rosy. With this caveat in mind, I continued my sermon.

Paul's relationship with the Philippians is certainly inspiring. So inspiring, that I was tempted to spend the rest of my time with you extolling the virtues of partnership; encouraging each and every one of us to bask in the fellowship that the beautiful environment of this retreat center gives us; romanticizing this otherwise subversive story into a theological "Barney song": "I love you, you love me, we are a happy Campbell-Stone family". I almost fell in the trap... almost.

At that moment I identified what was missing. I was not reading the text from my place as a Latino. I was using the exposition of the historical context to show erudition and gain the respect of the audience, not to establish a correlation between my social location and the social location of the text. Therefore, I read the text once again:

[1] Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the Bishops and deacons: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [3] I thank my God every time I remember you, [4] constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, [5] because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. [6] I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

"Paul and Timothy.. to the saints.. who are in Philippi..." At that point the text came to life. The introduction that seemed so harmless and dull was the key to the social location of the text. Paul was a Jew. As such, he belonged to a racial-ethnic minority in the Roman Empire. He was born and raised in Tarsus, a cosmopolitan city in a main commercial route that housed one of the largest libraries in Asia Minor. For its geographical location, Tarsus was considered "the meeting place of West and East, of the Greek culture with its Oriental counterpart."¹ No wonder Paul was fluent in Aramaic and in Greek. His writings show that he was well read. He quotes documents in Hebrew as well as other writings in Greek, such as the allusion to a Meneander in 1 Corinthians 15.33. He even had two names, Saul in Aramaic and Paul in Greek. Therefore, Paul was bilingual and bicultural.

The Apostle is writing to a church located in Philippi. This city bears the name of Philip II of Macedonia, who established it in 356 BCE as the capital of the region.² Philip was the father of Alexander III, also known as Alexander the Great. As we all know, Alexander's military conquests mark the beginning of the Hellenistic Era because they triggered the process of transculturation by which Greek language and culture became normative in the Mediterranean basin.

The phrase "Paul and Timothy.. to the saints.. who are in Philippi..." lead me to establish a correlation between my social location as a Latino in the United States

¹ *Harper's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v., "Tarsus" by Mark K. Milne, p. 1018.

² *Harper's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Philippi" by Robert A. Wild, p. 786.

of America and Paul's social location as a Jew in the Roman empire. Once the correlation was established, the innocuous, harmless and dull message of the text became a powerful prophetic voice:

"Partner" is a mighty strong term. A partner is a person with whom you share some of the most important aspects of your life. These aspects may be personal, professional, economic or legal, but partnership always implies a relationship of close cooperation in order to achieve a given goal. "Partner" is a powerful concept. A partner is an associate, a colleague, a companion... *an equal*, if you will. There is fellowship, harmony, unity between partners. In a word, there is "koinonía," that is, solidarity between people in partnership. Yes, "partner" is a mighty strong term.

If a partner is an equal, a colleague, a companion, then partnership is dangerous, precarious, subversive. A person that is in partnership with another recognizes the absolute humanity of his or her partner.

My partner is as human as I am.

My partner has the same rights that I have.

My partner has the same privileges... the same power.

A partnership is not a relationship defined by the power of one party over the other. It gives no place for control and domination of the weaker by the stronger. It has no room for the subordination of the powerless to the powerful.

In a partnership there are *no*:

- master and slave
- top and bottom
- center and margin
- upper and lower
- up-town and down-town
- richer and poorer
- high church and low church
- white and non-white

A partnership is defined by the "koinonía"; by the solidarity of the people involved in the venture. This is what the Apostle Paul emphasized in his "last will and testament."

[1] If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, [2] make my joy complete: Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not for your own interests, but to the interests of others. [5] Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God,... [7] emptied himself, taking the form of the slave,...

Philippians 2.1-7

These are powerful words. The Prince of the Universe became a *slave*! This word has a chilling effect on me. My grandfather was a black man, the son of freed slaves that toiled in the southern part of the island of Puerto Rico. *A slave*! This word still has a chilling effect on this nation. I am now living in Atlanta, in the state of Georgia. My house is a couple of hours away from Macon, the former capital of the South. As you wander through its beautiful fields of Georgia, you notice the cast iron landmarks that remind everyone who reads them of the bloody war that defiled our sacred land. You are reminded that the blood of thousands of women and men, young and old was shed in a fratricide conflict over the right of some to classify others into:

master and slave
top and bottom
center and margin
upper and lower
up-town and down-town
richer and poorer
high church and low church
white and non-white

As early as the crib we learn that there are two kinds of people: "Us" and "Them." "Us people" are good; "Them people" are bad. "Us people" are right; "Them people" are wrong. *"Us people" do not enter in partnership with "Them people."* I learned it; you learned it too.

Paul, "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (3.5), learned this lethal lesson early in his life. He learned that the Jews were the "Us people" and that the "goyim"--the non-Jews--were the "Them people." *"Us people" do not enter in partnership with "Them people"* was the motto that steered his life. Then some of "Us" (Jews) began to preach a Gospel that included "Them" (non-Jews) in a partnership with God. Paul, guided by his exclusionary motto, began to persecute, terrorize and even kill the traitors among "us." Yet, the zealous young Pharisee found--or may we say was found (Gal. 4.9)--by Jesus in the way to Damascus.

Therefore, what we find in Philippians is startling. A former "Us" person testifies that he lives in partnership with those he formerly thought as "Them people." A "subversive partnership" indeed.

As a bilingual and bicultural Hispanic man, born in New York and raised in the Caribbean, it is easy for me to identify with Paul. However, I realized that I had to avoid the pitfall of individualism. An individualistic reading would only romanticize my reading all over again. I had to keep in mind that the goal of

Hispanic theology is liberation.³ Fernando Segovia, of Vanderbilt University, correctly argues that a theology "of mixture and otherness" born out of the struggle and the pain of the Latino community "cannot but be a theology of struggle, liberation, and self determination." This goal has at least three important ramifications. First, a theology whose goal is the liberation of Hispanics calls for "an active and sustained struggle against the reigning social perceptions and conditions" exposing, thus, their oppressive character. This struggle "must also be waged in ecclesiastical and theological circles." Second, it calls for "a compelling and eschatological view of a different world with different possibilities and alternatives, a world in which human dignity, respect and rights prevail." Third, it calls for self-determination "in the retrieval and retelling of its own history, in the articulation of its own view of reality, and in the expression of its own future dreams and visions."⁴ This longing for liberation inspired the conclusion of my sermon.

"Like Paul, we learned rather early our place in society. I learned that the United States was the greatest nation of them all and that white Anglo-Saxon Protestants were the best people in the whole wide world. I also learned that I was not a genuine "American" and that--no matter how much I strive--I would never be one. I learned my place in the social power structure. I even learned that I was powerless in some settings and powerful in others... I still have to "unlearn" most of this. We all do...

We--church people--claim to be in partnership with each other. However, we must confess with much sadness that our relations are determined more by our place in the social power structure than by the message of the Gospel. God is calling us to mirror Paul's "subversive partnership" with the Philippians. I yearn to see all levels and constituencies of our denomination united in a sincere partnership. I long for the day when our practice of the faith will demonstrate that we affirm the following:

Every constituency of this Church is as human as mine.

Every constituency of this Church has the same rights as mine.

Every constituency of this Church has the same privileges... the same power.

We still have a lot to learn in order to achieve this kind of "subversive partnership." We also have a lot to "unlearn." To reach it, we even may have to find Jesus anew in the road to Damascus and convert.

³José David Rodríguez, "De apuntes a esbozo: Diez años de reflexión," *Apuntes* 10:4, (Winter 1990):78-79.

⁴Fernando Segovia, "Two Places and no Place on Which to Stand: Mixture and Otherness in Hispanic American Theology," *Listening* 27:1, (Winter 1992):33.

Resumen

Este artículo describe el proceso seguido por el autor para diseñar un sermón sobre Filipenses 1.1-6. La lectura e interpretación del texto está informada por principios hermenéuticos de la Teología Hispana. Dicha la lectura trata de establecer una correlación entre la localización social del texto y la del pueblo hispano en los Estados Unidos hoy día. Esto lleva a la conclusión de que la relación de compañerismo cristiano establecido entre Pablo y los filipenses trascendía las barreras raciales de la época. En este sentido, el sermón afirma que los creyentes que desean establecer verdaderas relaciones de compañerismo cristiano hoy deben trascender el racismo y reconocer la plena humanidad de los distintos grupos étnicos que componen la sociedad estadounidense.

Positions Open

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Hispanic Baptists in Texas: A Glorious and Threatened History

Ernest E. Atkinson

The Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas formed into an official denominational entity in May, 1910. Such action took place because of a strong feeling of "peripheriness." Pastors and churches, few in number, were on the outside of Anglo-consciousness and desired to have some kind of organization to help, not only solidify or "solidarize," but be an agent to promote growth through evangelism and extension efforts. This would be primarily through encouragement and provoking one another (churches) to reach out into the Mexican communities for an evangelistic touch. This, in fact, was what resulted from the formation of a state convention, *neither apart from the Baptist General Convention of Texas nor an integral part of said convention.*

Methods used in evangelizing were those known and taught by Southern/Texas Baptists and as a consequence people were required to leave their Catholic roots and be planted in a Baptist soil (religious context). Many of those who responded were children through Bible schools (Sunday) and evangelistic services. Adults also were garnered and trained for service and leadership in the churches. There was a strong insistence on forsaking anything which resembled Mexican Catholicism; from the old to the new was very much emphasized.

This original group of Mexican Baptists remained rather small up into the 1940's, when more growth was evidenced; and on into the 1950's and '60's. Because of socio-cultural factors, which included the religious context of the Mexican people, there was slow but consistent, healthy growth. It was a situation of a people with an already "popular religion" being evangelized by "outsiders" who sought to help them understand the simple gospel of the Kingdom of God and the Savior, Jesus Christ. This was what was preached to the people, many times in large gatherings. Their decision was their own and people responded.

Over years of slow growth a denomination was being formed. The people developed a "sense" of being Baptist in the Mexican context, which evolved toward larger accomplishments. Funds were received from outside agencies: the Home Mission Board, S.B.C., and the State Mission Board, B.G.C.T. But such monetary benefits did not cause the people to be drawn any closer to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, nor did the General Convention move in the direction of M.B.C.T., except through mutual encouragement and financial help.

The people were extremely poor, migratory because of working conditions, and basically a rural-agricultural people. Some worked in other occupations, such as mining, railroad maintenance, cattle and sheep raising, but maintained their identity

with great dignity. There were concentrations of Mexicans in some of the larger cities by the 1940's. Usually any significant growth of converts took place in these larger places, as the majority of the rural-agricultural were migratory and seasonal workers with roots in small towns and rural areas from whence they travelled to the different working areas over the state and beyond, returning home after harvest or termination of work.

Much of what happened in the span of fifty years (1910-60) resulted in a large percentage of the Mexican/Mexican-American Baptist workers being educated and encouraged by the Home Mission Board's department of language missions, the state convention mission department, along with the Texas Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

Only one training school was in operation from 1926-41. It was the Mexican Baptist Institute of Bastrop, Texas, under direction of missionary Paul C. Bell. The Mexican Baptist Seminary of Mexico came to Texas and was located in San Antonio, 1936-38; then in El Paso, 1938-46, when it returned to Mexico (Torreón, Coah.) Both schools provided an education modeled on the needs of the students. The Mexican Seminary was somewhat more Anglo-oriented and academic while the Mexican Baptist Institute was a more practical type of school-high school level and below, both academic and vocational.

The Mexican Baptist Bible Institute, located in San Antonio, opened the Spring Semester, 1948, a project of the San Antonio Baptist Association. In 1960-62, the school passed to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Missions Division, and continued its four-year program of studies. In 1982 the school became a component institution of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. Its name was changed to Hispanic Baptist Theological Seminary. At the end of six years, December 1988, it reverted to the Missions Division, B.G.C.T. Sometime later, ca. 1993, the program of studies was reduced to two years and continues as such, retaining its name.

By the late 1950's much more closeness had occurred and a stronger feeling of desiring to be a part of Baptist General Convention of Texas. A coming together took place through an official process called "Unification," between the years 1958-65. Much, but not all, of a sense of "peripheriness" had diminished, and "periphery" became a much more subtle factor of the Mexican-American Baptist experience. It has remained, even though a good number of efforts have been exerted to help create a feeling of "inclusiveness".

Many pastors attended and continue to attend only the Mexican Convention and "compañerismos" (associations). This number has increased because of immigrants coming from not only Mexico but from Central and South American

countries. (I have not been able to acquire information on the number of Hispanic Baptist pastors/ workers there are from each country. My guess is that the overall percentage is rather significant. Such information would say something with reference to the need of Hispanic theological education.)

A lack of a general feeling of "inclusiveness" is evidenced by maintaining an annual meeting called "Convención" which is only for information, promotion and inspiration. And, also, the utilization of what are called "Compañerismos", meeting monthly, bimonthly or quarterly.

Hispanic presence on the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board or who serve as trustees of Texas Baptist institutions is rather small. With offices in Dallas there is a small number of state workers, about six, who are staff members of the General Convention. The state coordinator who serves on the Missions Division for Ethnicity is Mexican-American. To him belongs direction of theological education for Hispanics, that is, whatever falls within the domain of the Missions Division.

"Hispanicness" is a reality which has not been considered, studied, taught, or understood sufficiently by a large percentage of Texas Baptists, either Hispanic or Anglo. Culture has been considered on few occasions and little done to "conscientize" [critical/reflective consciousness] either Anglos or Hispanics to the other group. Not being understood as Hispanics causes a feeling of being on the periphery and not "in the act."

Adequate theological preparation helps the Hispanic function on a more conscientious level and also does the same for the Anglo. With both understanding each other better, more is the promise of shared ministries. There well could be, with adequate training, an intercultural ministry involving both entities. Unbelievable results could come from this kind of ministry. The future bids us give sufficient attention to the "Hispanicness" of our Texas culture.

There is a certain "dislocation" which needs to be addressed and can only be improved by intentional efforts to move us all in the same direction. Certain costs are involved for moving toward an integrated Texas Baptist experience. Both groups would do well to develop a more serious theology which would serve to enrich both and would promote a much healthier "theological outlook" for future generations. Such endeavors would flow from the educational arm of the denomination, state Baptist universities and Southern Baptist seminaries. This would require a sufficiently adequate theological school for Hispanics, along with programs of studies for Hispanics in seminaries, including professors and curriculum. This kind of provision will come only with intentional planning and long range development. We have a "long way to go" and significantly more needs to be done to move us in that

direction. However, there are some efforts to take advantage of university facilities to offer occasional studies for Hispanics. Southwestern Baptist Seminary has a continuing education department which offers studies to Hispanics. There are some few other programs over the state, some autonomous and some related to the school in San Antonio; also, a number of seminary extension education programs affiliated with the Nashville office.

Texas Baptists have a task in the area of theological education which is being addressed. Hopefully, the Hispanic element will be taken into account in future planning, and provision made to afford the Hispanic worker with adequate theological preparation so that he/she may labor within the Hispanic context with a feeling of fulfillment. There is a rich theological world within the Hispanic context which needs our attention and will serve to enrich us. It is a theology that has to do with Hispanic "reality" (realidad) which means "lived experience", in the concrete, not in the abstract. The Bible serves as a mirror to interpret and re-interpret this reality in the light of experience, reflection, and re-interpretation. This world of theology is "wide open" and we should do whatever possible to open new "vistas" and surge forward toward new aspects of application--all moving toward a new century--the 2000's--just ahead!

Resumen

Los bautistas hispanos de Texas tienen ya una gloriosa historia de más de cien años durante los cuales se han esforzado para tener un programa adecuado de educación teológica. Varias escuelas, algunas que ya no existen, y programas especiales educaron bien a los obreros de varias generaciones. Ahora la situación es tal que se preocupa uno por ver que hay una gran necesidad para la formación teológica de dos grupos distintos: los México-americanos y los extranjeros. Se espera que la denominación bautista provea lo necesario para una buena formación de todos sus obreros.

Los hispanos viven en un mundo distinto, muy diferente del mundo anglo; y sus necesidades educativas son distintas también. Las destrezas necesarias no se adquieren sólo con el programa regular de educación universitaria. Para los México-americanos esto no es un problema serio, pero sí lo es para los hispanos del extranjero, quienes necesitan una formación que contribuya a su propio desarrollo y vivencia.

Los educadores bautistas del estado de Texas deben aceptar el reto y no dejar que la historia cuente lo contrario. Es necesario que los programas ofrezcan al hispano lo que necesita. El futuro promete muchos más hispanos, y por tanto, la necesidad de una educación teológica adecuada.

Challenges to the Pastoral Care of Central Americans in the United States

Kenneth G. Davis, O.F.M., Conv.

Relatively little research is available concerning Central Americans in the United States. This is especially true in the area of pastoral care. Although they are now probably the third largest U.S. Hispanic community, Latino/as of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican descent dominate the literature. Central Americans are usually included with South Americans or "other Latinos."¹

This article deals briefly with each country of origin, data specific to that particular population's situation in the U.S., and issues of pastoral care relevant to them.² The conclusion will present some broad ministerial recommendations, and a suggestion for future collaborative research.

By Central America, I refer to the five countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Some add Belize and Panama to this list.

Considering the Central Americans in the United States, I will attend only to the last four countries. There are Costa Ricans in the U.S., particularly in California.³ However, they are much less numerous than their fellow Central Americans.⁴ In general, people from this isthmus are older, more likely female, and slightly better educated than Mexican immigrants. They are even more highly urbanized. This can cause friction with other persons of color, especially other

¹ Although Central Americans were already widespread in the United States by the time of the Chicano movement, they only began to make headlines during the Sanctuary activity of the 1980s. Camarillo, A., "Latin Americans: Mexican Americans and Central Americans," in *The Encyclopedia of American Social History* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1993). See also Repak, Terry A., *Waiting on Washington: Central American Workers in the Nation's Capital*. (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1995).

² Within my own tradition, some of the few works with specific data on Central Americans are: a) González, Roberto and La Velle, *Hispanic American Pastoral Investigations*. (New York, NY: Northeast Catholic Pastoral Center for Hispanics, 1985); b) Office of Pastoral Research, *Hispanics in New York* (New York: Archdiocese of New York, 1982); c) Office of Research and Planning, *Presencia Nueva* (Newark: Archdiocese of Newark, 1988).

³ See the chapter, "The Central American Demographic Situation: Trends and Implications," in Bean, F.D., et al., eds. *Mexican and Central American Population and U.S. Immigration Policy* (Austin: The Center for Mexican American Studies, 1989).

⁴ Chicago is instructive. The 1990 census counted only 563 Costa Ricans, but over 12,000 Guatemalans, 2,000 Hondurans, and almost 4,000 Salvadorans. See the Latino Institute's *LatStat*, report #5, August 1995.

immigrants.⁵

Hondurans

The second-largest but least populous of these countries, Honduras has historically been marginal even in Central America. After the mines played out, colonial Honduras was a backwater of the Spanish Empire. Consequently, there was little incentive for continued Spanish immigration. Therefore, the population is largely mestizo with some few indigenous tribes.⁶ Neither the efforts of the Mexican empire nor the United Provinces of Central America could make this country more central to the region. Internal turmoil and external isolation continued until the early twentieth century.

By 1903 the Standard Fruit Company helped weld Honduras firmly into the neocolonial orbit of the U.S. A series of military dictatorships brought a veneer of stability, but also presided over an economy which was (until the Sandinista revolution) the worst of all of continental Latin America. In the 1950s various labor unions won important victories; however, popular attention was diverted by the so-called "Soccer War" with El Salvador in 1969.⁷

Many efforts at reform were attempted, but the military infiltrated or simply destroyed them. A persecution of the Catholic church in the 1970s resulted in many murders, the loss of church institutions, the exile of a bishop, and a general chill on all reform attempts both within the church and without.

By 1984 Honduras had firmly established ties with the anti-Sandista Reagan White House. Consequently, the military received considerable support. Increasingly this country was used as a base to resist the leftist groups in neighboring Nicaragua and El Salvador.⁸ Repression of labor movements and increased "disappearings" dispirited most organized opposition. As in El Salvador, the Jesuits were a notable exception to this reaction. Outside the North coast, mainline Protestant churches are still rather few in this country. Of note are the Evangélicos' many social services; some organized to promote social justice by forming the Christian Development

⁵ Steven P. Wallace, "Central American and Mexican Immigrant Characteristics and Economic Incorporation in California," *International Migration Review*, XX (3) 1986: 657-671.

⁶ See the Table "Black, Mulatto Populations in Latin America," *Hispanic Link Weekly Report* 15(5) 3 February 1997: 8.

⁷ See the various articles on Honduras in Tenebaum, B.A., ed., *Encyclopedia of Latina American History and Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁸ See related articles in Hopkins, J.W., ed. *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985).

Commission.⁹

With the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, and the peace achieved in El Salvador, Honduras received much less military support in the 1990s. Moreover, various border settlements with its neighbors diminished the rationale for such a pervasive military presence. This has helped bring about some strengthening of the civilian government relative to the military. However, years of corruption, dictatorship, and economic marginalization have left the country with little or no ability to compete in an increasingly technological world. Therefore, this decade saw a boom in Honduran migration to the U.S.

Hondurans may have come to this country as early as the 1830s; there is evidence of about 44 persons of Central American descent in that census. Their influx began to grow in the 1950s, and certainly by the 1970s they were eliciting notice in New York and New Orleans. At first this was associated with the international fruit business.¹⁰ At that time they were the most numerous (31,000) Central American community in the U.S., and the least racially white: hence, they drew attention. As with other Latino/a immigrants, they tended to gravitate to urban areas.¹¹

Los Angeles and Chicago now have significant Honduran communities. About 1,000 legally enter the country each year, and they are somewhat older than other documented Central Americans.¹² There is evidence that wealthy Hondurans enjoy tourism in the U.S. Of all Central Americans, Hondurans and Guatemalans have been granted the fewest permits as refugees, presumably because their countries did not experience officially recognized civil strife.¹³

⁹ Barry, Tom. *Central America Inside Out: The Essential Guide to Its Societies, Politics, and Economics* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991).

¹⁰ As with other immigrants, the economy was the main push-pull factor of Central Americans both before and after the recent civil strife. Many came to San Francisco as a result of coffee importation. See Pinderhughes, R. et al., *The Latstat Report, Poverty and Social Inequality in San Francisco: Focus on Latino Families and Children* (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 1996).

¹¹ "Central and South Americans," in Thernstrom, S., ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹² Central Americans may be older in general than the two largest Latino groups. While almost 72% of Mexicans and over 9% of Puerto Ricans in six states surveyed were children, only about 5% of Central Americans were preadolescents. This may be explained by the difficulty of transporting children (especially without documents) through such a long and hostile journey. Ortega, R.W., eds., *Latinos and Child Welfare* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan School of Social Work, 1996).

¹³ Reddy, M.A., ed. *Statistical Record of Hispanic Americans* (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1995).

Probably over 200,000 Honduras currently reside in the U.S. Some estimate that almost 70,000 are here without legal documents.¹⁴ Immigration is still strong. Those who enter with the proper documents tend to be both socially and economically more stable.¹⁵

Of the 131,066 Honduras counted in the 1990 census, 77% were foreign born. Despite this, they make up only 1.5% of all foreign-born Spanish speaking persons in the U.S.¹⁶ Their median age was 27.5 years; about half have a high school diploma or equivalent. Unemployment was 12.2%, median household income \$22,109.00. Over a quarter of Hondurans lived under the official poverty line. About one third worked in some kind of white collar occupation.¹⁷

As other Latino immigrants, Hondurans often migrate as clans. Entire villages in Honduras transplant themselves as extended families settle in close geographic proximity within the U.S. About 25% of them live in New York, 18% in Los Angeles, 14% in Miami, 7% in New Orleans, and 4% in Houston. Of all Latinos in New Orleans, however, Hondurans make up 20%, therefore their higher profile there.¹⁸

Like other Central Americans, Hondurans still do not generally have the long history nor the dominant numbers to yet have organized much civic, church or self-help associations. One exception is the Garífuna, an Afro-Caribbean minority within Honduras itself. This situation in their country of origin has forced them to

¹⁴ See *Hispanic Link* 13 December 1993. The same 1992 statistics compiled by the *Los Angeles Times* estimate undocumented Guatemalans at 121,000, Nicaraguans at 75,600, and Salvadorans at almost 300,000.

¹⁵ Latest figures from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (reported in *The New York Times* February 1997: A-7) estimate undocumented Central Americans at 335,000 Salvadorans, 165,000 Guatemalans, 90,000 Hondurans, and 70,000 Nicaraguans. All fall within the top nine countries of origin for undocumented U.S. residents, and together make up about 13% of all undocumented persons.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Hispanic Americans Today* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1993).

¹⁷ "Honduran Americans," in Chabrán, Richard and Rafael Chabrán, eds. *The Latino Encyclopedia*, Volume III (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1996). These official statistics, of course, must be reassessed in light of the probable majority (e.g., undocumented persons, migrants) which was never counted. For some historic perspective on all current statistics concerning Central Americans, consult chapter nine of Jaffe, A.J., et. al., eds. *The Changing Demography of Spanish Americans* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

¹⁸ Morton Winsberg, "Specific Hispanics," *American Demographics* (February 1994): 44-53.

value and maintain such close-knit social organizations even when emigrating.¹⁹

Pastors face at least two pastoral care issues specific to Hondurans. First is racial discrimination. They are a largely mestizo population, and their darker skin can result in prejudice and discrimination. Second, Hondurans are perhaps the least likely Central American group to have a formal relationship to any church. The institutional Catholic Church in Honduras is so poor and weak (in a population of some 5,000,000 there are only about 100 native priests) that it has never achieved great influence at any level of society. Hence, the number of unbaptized adults, and ignorance of Scripture, is remarkable. These issues need to be considered in pastoral care.

Salvadoreños

They come from the smallest, and most densely populated country of the isthmus. Although subordinated in colonial times to Guatemala, they trace their independent roots partly to the indigenous Nahuatl population. By 1856 they became the last of the Central American republics to become completely sovereign, although well into this century tensions with its neighbors flared periodically into violence.

A single crop economy (first indigo then coffee) developed an oligarchy of large land holders who ruthlessly wielded power as exemplified in the massacre of 1932. A relative liberalization of the military was reversed after the 1969 war with Honduras. Sandinista success only led to further fear and therefore reprisals by the military. Civil war erupted. The murder of the popular Archbishop Oscar Romero within Church property and while celebrating Mass underlined the vulnerability of absolutely everyone to the insane spiral of violence.²⁰ Persecution was not limited to Roman Catholics. The Baptists, Episcopalians and especially the Lutheran Church suffered.²¹

Salvadoreños come from a modern city state; they are quite urbanized even before reaching the U.S. About seventy-five thousand Salvadoreños were killed during the war. One in four was uprooted;²² huge numbers emigrated between

¹⁹ Peñalosa, Fernando. *Central Americans in Los Angeles: Background, Language, Education* (Los Angeles: The Spanish Speaking Mental Health Research Center, Occasional Paper #21, 1986). A complete reference on these and similar groups in Central American countries of origin is *Afro-Latin Americans Today: No Longer Invisible* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1995).

²⁰ Tenebaum, Volume II.

²¹ Barry.

²² Carlos B. Córdova, "Undocumented El Salvadoreans in the San Francisco Bay Area: Migration and Adaptation Dynamics," *Journal of La Raza Studies* 1 (Fall) 1978. Córdova is one of the most prolific writers about Central Americans in the U.S.

1971-1994, mostly to the U.S. Los Angeles now has more Salvadoreños than any other city outside El Salvador. They are also quite numerous in New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco and Houston, constituting the largest Central American community in the U.S.

The 1990 census counted over 565,000 Salvadoreños; this may represent only 40% of all those actually in the country. Similarly, official statistics rate their median age at about 26, unemployment at 10.5%, and median household income as \$23,729.00. About 34% have a high school equivalency, yet over 22% live in poverty.

As with Hondurans and others, these official statistics deal almost exclusively with those who are here with documents. If one factors in undocumented Salvadoreños, for instance, the median income probably drops closer to \$10,000.00.²³ There is evidence that Central Americans with documents, particularly Salvadoreños, are more likely to be entrepreneurs.²⁴ The undocumented seem to be very much younger, and more likely of rural origin.²⁵

Of all Central Americans, Salvadoreños received the only treatment even approaching favored status. While only about 3% received asylum, the Temporary Protected Status (later Deferred Enforced Departure Decree) in 1990 and extended through 1995 gave them the right to work.²⁶

However, relatively few Central Americans benefited from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act since so many arrived in the U.S. after 1982. The recession of the 1980s, the successful lawsuits brought against the Sanctuary Movement, and successive anti-immigrant legislation has made life increasingly

²³ Cecilia Menjivar, "Immigrant Social Networks: Implications and Lessons for Policy," *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy* 8 (1994-1995): 35-58. For a comparison of data between documented and undocumented Salvadoreños see Vernez, George et. al., "Surveying Immigrant Communities," *Focus* (University of Wisconsin--Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty) 18(2) Fall/Winter 1996-7: 19-23.

²⁴ Chincilla, N. and N. Hamilton *Central American Enterprises in Los Angeles* (Austin: The Center For Mexican American Studies, 1989).

²⁵ *SHARE Bulletin* 5(3) August/September 1986.

²⁶ United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial and Ethnic Tensions in American Communities: Poverty Inequality and Discrimination* (Volume I). Washington, D.C., 1993. See also Doreen Carvajal, "Salvadorans in U.S. Get Asylum From Own Government," *The New York Times* 26 October 1996. Estimates about 190,000 of one million Salvadorans in the U.S. qualified.

difficult for Salvadoreño immigrants this decade.²⁷

Compared with other Latino/a immigrants, Salvadoreños are fairly politicized. They are used to organizing themselves, and often expect and accept the churches to be involved in organized activities which confront injustice. However, this is not universal. It is precisely the deep political differences among Salvadoreños which has tended to divide them, even disrupting extended family networks so often crucial to immigrant survival.²⁸ Dealing with this dicey issue is a pastoral challenge of particular note when working with this group.

Guatemalans

This community comes from the most populous country in Central America, and the one with the most indigenous persons including Quichés, Chujes, Acatecs, and Kanjobales. Independence in the early nineteenth century led to a landed coffee elite by the end of that century. Successive military dictatorships began to weaken in the 1930s but a 1954 military coup ended this reform. A return to civilian government in 1986 did not mean a return to peace. Not only was there an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1993, but human rights abuses, particularly against indigenous populations, continued. Prospects for peace, however, increased dramatically with the efforts of Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu.²⁹

March 1988 saw the Catholic Church beginning a much more explicit campaign for social justice than in previous decades. However, the fastest growing congregations come from non-mainline Protestants. Not all of them mirrored the policies of Ríos Montt; Catholics joined with some to form the National Campaign for Life and Peace.³⁰ In general, the public role of Christians in the political life of Guatemala has been historically quite important.

Immigrants from Guatemala are perhaps the most rural, especially those

²⁷ Guides to the sanctuary movement include Bau, I., *This Ground is Holy: Church Sanctuary and Central American Refugees* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985) and Golden R. and M. McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), and H. Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Río Grande* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota, 1995).

²⁸ Ferris, Elizabeth G., ed. *The Central American Refugees* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

²⁹ Burgos-Debray, E., ed. *Rigoberta Menchú* (London: Verso, 1984). A formal peace with (a controversial) universal amnesty was recently signed. For Ms. Menchú's influence on North America consult Allen Carey-Webb and Stephen Benz, *Teaching and Testimony: Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom* (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1996).

³⁰ Barry.

settling in Florida.³¹ In the eighties their plight was particularly desperate, but a class action suit helped their asylum approval increase by more than sevenfold. Urban areas where they concentrate are Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Even in Los Angeles they make up less than 1% of the total population.

Official statistics state that 80% of Guatemalans in the U.S. are foreign born, 38% completed high school, 10.2% are unemployed, and 21.1% live in poverty. Median household income is over \$24,500.00, and the median age is 27.³² Those who work with Guatemalans suspect that, especially for the indigenous, these figures are quite optimistic.³³

Persons ministering to Guatemalans in the U.S. must be particularly sensitive to the riches and special needs of the indigenous populations. Very few resources are available to pastors who wish to learn the language or scholars who simply wish to understand the situation. Perhaps groups such as the Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana, the Program for the Analysis of Religion Among Latinos, or the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States can help to remedy this situation.

Nicaraguans

Come from the largest of the Central American countries. This and their very high birth rate have not meant an enormous population. However, its geographic location including the lake of Nicaragua, made it a victim of repeated invasions by British and U.S. soldiers of fortune who wanted to create a transoceanic canal during the nineteenth century. Formal U.S. government intervention began early the next century, its most infamous chapter being the occupation of the country in the 1930s which included the repression of Augusto César Sandino and the installation of the Somoza dynasty.

Sandino died but his cause resurrected in the successful Sandinista insurrection of 1979. At first the Catholic Church and mainline Protestants generally supported the revolution. However, once the Sandinistas were firmly in power, this

³¹ L. Rohter, "In a Florida Haven for Guatemalans, Seven Deaths Bring New Mourning," *The New York Times*, 24 October 1991: A18.

³² Chabrán.

³³ María Andrea Miralles in her work *A Matter of Life and Death: Health-Seeking Behavior of Guatemalan Refugees in South Florida* (New York: AMS Press, 1989) states the median age as 24, and median family income as just over \$11,600.00. For more recent statistics see Carey Goldberg, "Hispanic Households Struggle as Poorest of the Poor in U.S.," *The New York Times*, 30 January 1997: A1, A12.

religious consensus deteriorated and was an important factor in the 1990 election of rival Violeta Chamorro.³⁴

Under the Sandinistas the country suffered tense and sometimes violent relations with the U.S. The civil war and following internal tensions, including battles with the contras, led to the emigration of up to 18% of the population.³⁵ Even those who remained often hedged their bets by sending investments and some family members out of the country.³⁶

As refugees from communism, the first Nicaraguans arriving in the U.S. were fairly well received, at one point accounting for almost one third of all political asylum granted by our government. That favorable situation, however, is changing.

They are somewhat older than other Central American immigrants, and more urban. Greater Miami is home to probably 150,000 Nicaraguans, making them the second largest Latino group in Dade county. Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Washington, D.C. also have large numbers.³⁷

Sending economic support to loved ones back home preoccupies all Central American immigrants. However, Nicaragua's economy has suffered a steeper decline than any other in the last twenty years. Therefore that difficulty, coupled with the increasing complication in maintaining their legal status or arranging for the arrival of family members, is particularly acute within this population.³⁸

Ministerial Recommendations and Research Suggestion

Pastors must first become intimately knowledgeable of their local community. This includes the ecclesial community he or she serves, the organizations which can or do serve Central Americans, and the greater community especially regarding its attitude toward these people in its midst. What follows are some general observations which may be helpful as a pastor intentionally observes and studies her

³⁴ Barry. A criticism of the Chamorro administration was its close ties with Catholicism, especially the charismatic movement, La Cuidad de Dios.

³⁵ R.A. Alvarado Umanzor, "Las migraciones internacionales en Centroamérica en la década de los noventa: causas, implicaciones y consecuencias," *Estudios migratorios latinoamericanos* 8(23) 1993: 31-52.

³⁶ Hopkins.

³⁷ Mireya Navarro, "After Years in Exile in Miami, Nicaraguans Ponder Home," *The New York Times*, 21 March 1995: A1, A12.

³⁸ For a wonderful synopsis of Nicaraguans in New York, from Rubén Darío to Ernesto Cardenal, see Paul Berman's "Nicaragua in Nueva York," *Village Voice* 36(4) 22 January 1991: 27, 41-42.

or his community.³⁹

Central Americans share certain challenges common to other Latinos and Latinas. Among these are high rates of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, and associated low rates of insurance and access to banking services. While Central American immigrants appear on average to be relatively well educated this does not necessarily translate into economic opportunities. Many foreign professionals are not accepted here and therefore labor at menial tasks. Crime, alcohol, drugs, poor public services and high costs of living are associated with urban barrios. However, rural areas may not have even the minimal support services (especially in languages other than English) that cities offer.

Undocumented immigrants face other challenges. Lack of proper papers make education and employment even more difficult, and a willingness to cooperate with any institution (e.g., hospitals, schools, police) more frightening. The need to provide for family in the home country exacerbates the immigrant's own precarious economic situation. Families are split by borders, and immigrant families divided by levels of acculturation. Children who have learned English and the intricacies of modern society sometimes take on the roles of parents. Families often spend much time apart, and this can lead to abrupt changes in family systems and/or the creation of more than one set of dependents.

Central Americans, however, find it even more difficult to maintain cultural contact or familial communications with their home countries because of the enormous distances between the U.S. and that isthmus. Moreover, other pueblos dominate the Spanish language media in this country.

There is at least anecdotal evidence that Central Americans are often eyed with suspicion by other Latinos and Latinas. Perceived competition for jobs, public funds and political power creates tensions. Although non-Hispanics often refer to Central Americans as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans or Cubans, they themselves know that they are doubly invisible. Anglos see them as another brown face, but the other dominant Latina communities may also maintain them on the margins.⁴⁰ And generally Central Americans do not have the history to have created their own social or ecclesial organizations. Internal disunity, and a common immigrant feeling that

³⁹ For a directory of possible organizations with whom to network, consult the *Directory of Organizations for Immigrant Rights* (San Antonio: The Hispanic Research Center at the University of Texas at San Antonio, 1996).

⁴⁰ Kurt Andersen, "The New Ellis Island," *Time* 13 June 1983: 18-25.

their stay in this country is temporary, complicate the situation.⁴¹

Perhaps the most important distinguishing pastoral concern is the incredible level of violence these people suffer. Many have been threatened, beaten, jailed or tortured in their home countries.⁴² Some feel guilty for having survived.⁴³

Many have experienced warfare or seen loved ones die. Others live with the open wound of not knowing what happened to friends or family who simply disappeared. Hurried, secretive departures left no time to bring closure to relationships of a lifetime.

Perhaps even more have been victims of crime or official corruption during their journey North. We are just beginning to document the horrors both the Mexican and U.S. authorities have inflicted on these people.⁴⁴ Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosomatic symptomatology, and domestic violence are evidence of this suffering.⁴⁵

Again, it is obviously vital to understand the background of each congregant. Moreover, there is a substantial body of literature which shows that trained clergy can

⁴¹ Carlos B. Córdova, "The Social, Cultural, and Religious Realities of Central American Immigrants in the United States," in Pineda, Ana María and Robert Schreiter, eds. *Dialogue Rejoined: Theology and Ministry in the United States Hispanic Reality* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995).

⁴² Evidence continues to surface of the involvement of the United States in these extra-judicial proceedings. See L. Rohrer, "Declassified U.S. Documents Frustrate Guatemalans," *The New York Times*, 9 August 1996.

⁴³ Cervantes, R.C. et. al., *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Immigrants from Central America and Mexico* (Los Angeles: Spanish Speaking Mental Health Research Center, 1988) reports that over half of his population have been victims of violence. This work is out of print, however, an abstract is available in the *Research Bulletin* (Spring, 1987): 5-6.

⁴⁴ With Eduardo Fernández I cover Latina/o immigrants each March in *Review for Religious*. For stories of Mexican police brutality see Guy Gugliotta, "The Central American Exodus: Grist for the Migrant Mill," *Caribbean Review* 11(1) Winter 1983. Also, "Qué Pasa Con Los Inmigrantes Ilegales Que Entren a México?" *El Visitante Dominicano* 25 August 1996. At the same time it is important to note that others, especially Christians, are helping Central Americans in both countries. See Mark Fazlollah, "Fleeing Salvadorans: The Painful Journey North," *Migration Today* XII (2), and Ann Crittenden, *Sanctuary: A Story of American Conscience and the Law in Collision*. (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988).

⁴⁵ See Claudia Dorrington, "Central American Refugees in Los Angeles: Adjustment of Families and Children," in Zambrana, R.E., ed. *Understanding Latino Families: Scholarship, Policy and Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995).

be particularly helpful to Latinos and Latinas who need counseling.⁴⁶

However, many clergy do not have the training necessary to provide this level of counseling. Those who do, and who also have the requisite cultural and linguistic background, are few. And they may be unable, precisely by virtue of their licensing boards or institutional employers, to attend to an undocumented, poor, improperly insured community.

As a final recommendation, especially for future research, I would like to return to an idea I have previously broached in the pages of *Apuntes*.⁴⁷

Based on studies of two self-help groups, I have concluded that there are striking parallels between the dynamics of these groups and the *mutualismo* which often exists among Hispanic extended families, fictive kin, community associations etc. Further research has led me to be even more convinced of the great potential pastors can have in linking their communities with self help organizations. I myself hope to continue this research, and I invite the collaboration of other interested scholars and pastors. We need a sustained, ecumenical, and interdisciplinary approach; I urge it upon persons of good will.

Resumen

La creciente inmigración de personas procedentes de América Central plantea una serie de retos pastorales a la iglesia. Para responder adecuadamente a tales retos, es necesario conocer algo del trasfondo y de las características generales de cada grupo de inmigrantes. Puesto que el número de costarricenses que emigra hacia los EE.UU. es relativamente pequeño, este artículo centra su atención sobre los hondureños, salvadoreños, nicaragüenses y guatemaltecos. Sobre cada uno de estos grupos se ofrecen estadísticas y algo de historia. Además, se ofrecen algunas ideas exploratorias sobre la relación entre estos grupos de inmigrantes más recientes y otros grupos de la comunidad latina en los EE.UU.

⁴⁶ H. Paul Calfant, et.al., "The Clergy as a Resource for Those Encountering Psychological Distress," *Review for Religious Research* 31(3) March 1990: 305-313. While the literature I reviewed did not deal specifically with Central Americans, I believe trained and sensitive clergy counselors could be just as effective with that population.

⁴⁷ See volume 10 number 2, and volume 12 number 3.

La proclamación del evangelio hoy en Centro América: una reflexión teológica

George Cruz

La tarea de proclamar el evangelio al concluir la segunda mitad de esta última década del siglo XX nos presenta una diversidad de problemas ya que el mundo ha avanzado con pasos gigantescos en todos los campos del saber. Vivimos en un mundo donde en los últimos cincuenta años hemos visto más cambios en las ciencias que en los cinco mil años anteriores. Como dice Jorge Rodríguez, teólogo hondureño de la Comisión Cristiana de Desarrollo, "sobre nuestras cabezas están pasando millones de dólares vía el correo electrónico del internet", algo inimaginable unos veinticinco años atrás.

El ser humano hoy día cambia con cada puesta del sol, y por lo tanto podríamos decir que las comunidades a las cuales estamos llamados a proclamar el evangelio son comunidades "*Proteanas*", es decir, que se asemejan al dios griego Proteo, que alteraba su apariencia y forma de ser para así satisfacer las diferentes situaciones que lo confrontaban, escondiendo constantemente su verdadero aspecto y forma de ser.

Hasta hace muy poco, muchas de nuestras comunidades tenían características de permanencia, mas hoy día encontramos que las comunidades cambian cada día. Para encontrar una comunidad que tenga características de permanencia tenemos que ir a las aldeas más remotas de las selvas amazónicas.

Como proclamadores del evangelio confrontamos la situación irónica que se nos presenta cuando hacemos una comparación analítica entre las comunidades de hoy y las culturas que prevalecen en ellas, y las comunidades y culturas del primer siglo que fueron las que escucharon las palabras del evangelio por primera vez. No es lo mismo escuchar hoy las palabras "serás salvo tú y tu casa", como lo fue para el carcelero del capítulo 16 de Hechos.

La pregunta que cabe hacernos aquí es: ¿Cómo trasladamos la historia de Jesús, el Cristo de Dios, desde el primer siglo al siglo XX y XXI sin que pierda su poder creativo y su espíritu de vida? Es decir, ¿cómo la trasladamos sin comprometer su veracidad histórica? Como si fuera poco el cambio drástico que han experimentado la iglesia y la sociedad, ahora tenemos que preocuparnos de cuidar un mensaje antiguo que nunca pierde lo novedoso de su contenido. Esta tarea se complica mucho más cuando nos damos cuenta de que son escasos los recursos que tenemos en el mundo de habla castellana para la reflexión y el análisis, tanto sociológico como

exegetico y teológico.¹

No se puede negar que existe una crisis en la proclamación del evangelio de Jesús el Cristo en América Latina hoy. Esta crisis se debe a que hay una gran escasez de materiales exegeticos que expongan las realidades socio-económicas e históricas de las diferentes épocas bíblicas, es decir, que expliquen la realidad vivida cuando fueron escritos los diferentes libros de la Biblia, y cómo estas realidades se relacionan con la realidad actual en América Latina.²

La escasez que existe se puede apreciar especialmente en los lugares rurales de muchos países en la región. Personalmente he podido vivir esta realidad durante mi estadia en Honduras como misionero con la Iglesia Presbiteriana trabajando con la Comisión Cristiana de Desarrollo en el área de la educación teológica. En muchos lugares un gran número de pastores y líderes religiosos no poseían ni un diccionario bíblico con el cual hacer sus estudios o preparar sus sermones.

La Biblia es el único texto que existe en muchos lugares. Aunque la Biblia contiene la Palabra de Dios, tiene que ser entendida y analizada a partir de su contexto histórico. Esto significa que la palabra tiene que entenderse a partir de la realidad en que cada libro fue escrito.

La crisis se agudiza aun más cuando nos damos cuenta de que las palabras de la Biblia en muchos casos no significan lo mismo que hoy. Para los cristianos del primer siglo la palabra *conocer* o *conoció* significaba tener una relación íntima de amor, pero hoy la misma palabra significa solamente tener conciencia intelectual de alguien o algo.

Es imperativo reconocer que en muchos de estos lugares donde existe esta escasez literaria, encontramos una riqueza de conocimiento oral que unida a la

¹ En los últimos quince años ha habido una explosión de materiales de análisis teológico y sociológico por el Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano y el Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones tanto por teólogos y teólogas de renombre, como lo son el Dr. Pablo Richard y la Dra. Elsa Tamez, y lo mismo se puede decir en el campo de la sociología con expertos como Helio Gallardo, Franz J. Hinkelammert y Otto Maduro.

² En ocasiones esto se debe a diferencias ideológicas entre grupos eclesiásticos. Un ejemplo clásico es fue el de SETEHO, el Seminario Teológico de Honduras, y su insistencia en no compartir con sus estudiantes la gran explosión de materiales técnicos y científicos en los campos de la teología y la sociología a nivel continental con personajes como la teóloga mexicana Elsa Tamez, el biblista Pablo Richard y otros eruditos y eruditas.

información ausente podría llegar a ser una fuente de conocimiento incalculable.³

La necesidad de poner al alcance de todos recursos para la interpretación sociológica, histórica y exegética es imperativa. Cuando estos materiales faltan, o bien se crea un espíritu de superioridad espiritualista irreal en quienes no los tienen, o bien surgen enseñanzas e ideas tergiversadas que no solamente confunden al pueblo, sino que subyugan al mismo pueblo que se pretende liberar.⁴

¿Cuál es la tarea de la predicación hoy?

Si es verdad que la tarea de la predicación de hoy es nutrir al pueblo de Dios con el propósito de equipar a la comunidad de fe para la tarea de la justicia, es decir por medio del hecho de que “han adquirido la sensibilidad interior y saben distinguir lo bueno y lo malo”, entonces esta prédica tiene que ser contextualizada a partir de una reflexión que seriamente tome en cuenta la realidad existencial en que vive el pueblo. He aquí la necesidad suprema de una exégesis autóctona para la predicación, y la necesidad de materiales adecuados.

La proclamación del evangelio hoy en América Latina se está haciendo cada vez más difícil por cuanto se ha convertido en una tarea peligrosa.⁵ Numéricamente la iglesia esta creciendo a pasos gigantescos. Pero, ¿significará esto que el evangelio está siendo proclamado?⁶ La iglesia vive en tensión, predicando un dogma impuesto por un sistema de conquista que muchas veces es ignorado por quienes predicán. Esto ha debilitado el mensaje de liberación, que es céntrico al mensaje de Jesús.⁷

Para que la iglesia cumpla con su compromiso de proclamar, tiene que comenzar con una autocritica que la lleve a evangelizarse a sí misma, de modo que su proclamación sea reflexiva (en la Iglesia Católica esto se tiene que dar dentro de la jerarquía). El mensaje muchas veces no marcha al ritmo de la realidad y del dolor humano que padece el pueblo oyente, un pueblo saturado y dominado por el pecado estructural que se implantó con la Conquista.

³ Anthony J. Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers, Meeting the Challenge of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 56-83.

⁴ Cuando era niño se me decía en la iglesia que no podía ir al cine porque allí había “sillas de escamecedores.”

⁵ Este es uno de los temas que se presentan en *Xilotl: Revista nicaragüense de teología*, número 18: *La predicación en un mundo de cambios*, diciembre 1996.

⁶ Véase “*El fenómeno de iglecrecimiento en Honduras*”, tesis presentada por Iris Manuela Barrientos P. para obtener el título de Licenciada en Teología, SETEHO, 1995.

⁷ Véase el pasaje de Lucas 4:18-19.

El predicador no está llamado a ser un terapeuta clínico, sino un poeta que hable de parte de Dios (de parte de la verdad), quien conoce los corazones y las mentes del pueblo que escucha. Esta proclamación de la verdad significa riesgo y amenaza.⁸

Carácter cumulativo de la predicación

La predicación es un acto cumulativo, es decir, cada sermón viene a formar parte de la construcción de lo que es la iglesia. Cada sermón forma parte de un proceso que habla, comunica, e instruye a la comunidad de fe que es el pueblo de Dios aquí y ahora, en un lugar y contexto específicos.⁹ Este lugar tiene que ser visto como un lugar sociológico, económico, psicológico y teológico donde los seres humanos viven sus vidas. Por lo tanto, el sermón que no está conciente de esta realidad pierde de vista el guía que conduce al predicador en el proceso de la creación del pueblo de Dios. En casos de crisis sociales esta tarea se vuelve peligrosa. Un ejemplo de esto puede ser el encuentro que tiene David cuando confronta a Goliat y su amenaza contra el pueblo de Dios, o la misma muerte de Jesús.

¿A quién pertenece la predicación?

La predicación le pertenece con toda propiedad a la iglesia local, mas todo pastor o pastora debería desear que cada uno de sus sermones llevase en sí una representación de la catolicidad del mensaje de la Palabra de Dios que se predica. Es decir, que aunque la iglesia local ha sido llamada a ser la proclamadora del reino de Dios, su carácter local tiene que llevar ese aspecto inconfundible de la catolicidad de la Palabra de Dios. Este es un punto que Thomas G. Long enfatiza muy claramente.¹⁰ Cuando un sermón no incluye el alcance de la catolicidad del evangelio, sufre de un provincialismo exagerado que en efecto lo mata. A tiempo o fuera de tiempo la predicación tiene por obligación, que ser intencionalmente provincial y católica, es decir local y global. La pobreza no es una realidad local solamente, sino también global. Es cierto que la pobreza puede ser una realidad local dentro del contexto de quien predica, pero si esa persona no está conciente de que la pobreza es un problema de pecado universal no hará justicia al tema en su contexto específico y local.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

⁹ *Xilotl*, no. 18, año 9, diciembre 1996. Yolanda Demetrio, "Haciendo la predicación con sentido de mujer", p. 60.

¹⁰ Thomas G. Long, ed. *Preaching In and Out of Season* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), p. 92.

El carácter provincial y católico de la proclamación es un fenómeno que se da dentro de las diferentes denominaciones eclesíásticas. Esto significa que la proclamación del evangelio tiene que ser denominacional en fidelidad al dogma local, y al mismo tiempo ecuménica en fidelidad a la catolicidad de la Palabra de Dios.

En busca de terreno común

Hay una diversidad que rodea al púlpito. Esta surge del espíritu global, ecuménico e incluyente que estamos viviendo hoy como miembros de un mundo cosmopolita. Esta realidad sobrecarga la tarea de la predicación, creando la necesidad de encontrar un medio de enlazar el evangelio con algún elemento en el pluralismo de nuestra era. ¿Cuáles pudieran ser algunos de estos medios? O, ¿qué paradigmas pueden darle forma a nuestro sermón y al mismo tiempo ofrecerle el espacio necesario para su desarrollo? Estas son preguntas que cada lector puede investigar por sí mismo.

Para que el sermón sea pertinente, y no mera palabrería de abstracciones, tiene que hacer hincapié sobre la realidad existencial y concreta de la comunidad a la cual se dirige. De no ser así el sermón se convertiría en pieza musical sin sentido, sin ritmo o clave.

Tal vez podríamos llegar a tres conclusiones de lo que hasta aquí hemos dicho: primera, que la predicación tiene que ser contextual y global; segunda, que tiene que ser denominacional y ecuménica (o inter-religiosa); y tercera, que tiene que ser sacramental, es decir, darse dentro del contexto de la celebración de la fe.

Walter Brueggemann describe la predicación de dos formas básicas. En la primera el propone que la exposición de la Palabra de Dios se hace en forma de prosa. Por prosa, se refiere al hecho de que el mundo está organizado según fórmulas establecidas hasta tal punto que las mismas oraciones pastorales e inclusive las cartas de amor suenan como memorandums de oficinas. Aquí se refiere al sermón prosaico.¹¹

En su segunda descripción de la predicación, Brueggemann insiste en que el predicador tiene que ser poeta. Mas sin embargo, por poeta no se refiere a ritmo o tiempo, sino al uso de la palabra de tal manera que surja con poder vivificante, que transforme al oyente, que cree nuevas posibilidades de vida dentro de la comunidad donde se proclama dicha palabra poética, palabra poética inspirada por Dios.

La predicación poética es la única proclamación digna de ser llamada

¹¹ *Loc. cit.*

predicación en un mundo reduccionista. El mundo en que vivimos hoy es un mundo muy formal, ha reducido todo a un sí o a un no. La iglesia, siguiendo por el mismo camino, ha perdido de vista los colores multifacéticos que componen la complejidad de la vida presente.

La proclamación del evangelio tiene por obligación que ser poética en un sentido profético, es decir, que tiene que ser tal que rompa estructuras dañinas de muerte y que invoque nuevas posibilidades de vida para quienes escuchan la escucha. Tiene que ser retante y hasta peligrosa por cuanto su forma *poética-profética* llame a juicio a las estructuras de pecado institucional que causan dolor y miseria en nuestro mundo. El poeta (profeta) reta al mismo evangelio que predica, ya que el mismo tiene que partir de la realidad de un contexto cultural específico, es decir, no se da en un vacío. Por tal razón, la pregunta que debe surgir es la que sigue:

¿Cómo trasladamos la historia de Jesús del primer siglo al siglo XX y XXI sin que pierda su poder dinámico y vivo, y sin comprometer su veracidad histórica? Como si fuera poca cosa el cambio drástico que han estado experimentando la iglesia y la sociedad, ahora tenemos que preocuparnos de cuidar un mensaje antiguo que nunca pierde lo novedoso de su contenido.

Para que la palabra sea efectiva y lleve a cabo su propósito el predicador tiene que estar al tanto, es decir, tiene que tener su dedo sobre el pulso histórico-teológico de la sociedad en que vive y el mundo en que se mueve. De no ser así la palabra es pronunciada sin meta definida y clara; el predicador proclama al azar. Tener el dedo sobre el pulso de la sociedad y el tiempo histórico-teológico significa discernir las señales de los tiempos en que vive la iglesia (aquí es imperativo tener al alcance materiales científicos y técnicos para el análisis y la reflexión). Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, muchos creyentes tanto en Europa como en los Estados Unidos de Norte América vivieron como avestruces, sin definición clara de una relación dinámica entre su fe y la realidad existencial de la sociedad que se encontraba en guerra. Se predicaba al viento no tomando en cuenta las atrocidades causadas por esta situación de conflicto bélico. La "Palabra de vida" se proclamaba sin ver su relación con la historia en proceso y por lo tanto producía un estancamiento y a la postre, muerte.

Estar al tanto de la hora histórica-teológica de la sociedad significa tener una visión clara de la voluntad de Dios y su autoridad en términos de su Palabra frente a las injusticias sociales. Esto inevitablemente nos lleva a la crisis que existe entre la fidelidad al texto vivo y nuestra fidelidad al momento histórico. Bonhoeffer pudo entender esta dinámica entre Palabra divina y realidad socio-histórica y teológica. Él entendió que la Palabra divina tenía algo que decir a la locura humana que se desplegaba en forma desenfrenada por el mundo. Pudo entender que a un lado de la ecuación se encontraba la muerte en forma masiva, y que al otro lado la posibilidad

de vida abundante en el Dios de la justicia.

Tal vez hoy en Centro América, nosotros los que nos preocupamos por la proclamación del evangelio de Jesús el Cristo de Dios, nos podríamos hacer la siguiente pregunta: ¿Qué tiene que decir la Palabra de Dios al nuevo sistema económico neo-liberal, especialmente frente a la pobreza más inmundada que jamás se haya visto en este continente? Si es verdad que la Palabra de Dios es Palabra de Dios solamente cuando se da en un contexto específico, entonces, cuál es el mensaje que tiene Dios para nosotros hoy en América Latina, quienes nos encontramos en una situación muy específica de pobreza e injusticia incomprensibles?

Summary

We live in a rapidly changing world that has experienced more change in the last fifty years than in the previous 5000 years of recorded human history. This poses a big crisis to the preaching event in Central America in light of the fact that there are very few exegetical and research tools at hand in the Spanish language, especially amongst those of Protestant tradition. Not having these resources at hand makes the task of preaching that more difficult. For one thing, many preachers end up preaching their own capricious ideas since many fail to see or understand the holistic nature of the Word of God that we as the Church are called to proclaim. This holistic nature of the Word has a global as well as a local nature. If the Word proclaimed is not going to become an irrelevant parroting of meaningless ideas, it must take note of the concrete reality that is being lived by the communities that are called to listen. We could probably conclude that preaching in Central America must be contextual and global, denominational and ecumenical, and it must be sacramental, that is to say, it must take place in the context of everyday real life experience. In Central America this prophetic task of preaching could perhaps begin by asking the question: What does the Word of God have to say to the new neo-liberal economic system that is causing so much pain in our society today?

